

# Religious Freedom Amendment

*The Religious Freedom Amendment, a proposed constitutional amendment to protect religious freedom, is supported by religious organizations and others across America, with over 150 House cosponsors, including the House leadership.*

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### What would the RFA do?

The Religious Freedom Amendment (House Joint Resolution 78) corrects court actions and trends which have suppressed religious expression; it will permit student-initiated prayers in public schools. The RFA retains the First Amendment's safeguards against official religion, and keeps school prayer voluntary, but protects it just as other forms of free speech are protected.

### What about school prayer?

The RFA allows student-sponsored prayer in public schools, but explicitly prohibits government-composed prayers for students, and bans any effort to compel anyone to take part. If students so desire, their prayers would be permitted in the same way that other orderly free speech is permitted.

### The Religious Freedom

**Amendment follows the same standard which the Supreme Court has applied to the Pledge of Allegiance: No student could be compelled to take part, but those who don't want to participate are not permitted to censor and silence those who do.** The rights of all are protected by the Religious Freedom Amendment.



## TEXT OF THE AMENDMENT—HJR 78

***To secure the people's right to acknowledge God according to the dictates of conscience: Neither the United States nor any State shall establish any official religion, but the people's right to pray and to recognize their religious beliefs, heritage or traditions on public property, including schools, shall not be infringed. Neither the United States nor any State shall require any person to join in prayer or other religious activity, prescribe school prayers, discriminate against religion, or deny equal access to a benefit on account of religion.\****

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Students could take turns, as they do on so many other matters in school. A majority group could not insist that only its prayers are heard. But a single objector (or a small number) could no longer silence the other students, so long as no one is compelled to take part. And no larger group of students could censor a smaller number.

### What public support does this have?

Public opinion polls for the last 35 years consistently show three-fourths of the American public support a constitutional amendment to allow voluntary prayer in public schools, and to protect religious liberties.

### Does this absolutely require a constitutional amendment?

Since 1962, the Supreme Court has blocked all

other solutions. The courts have already changed our Constitution by distorting the original intent of the First Amendment; this amendment repairs that damage. Courts jeopardize our rights by creating a "freedom from hearing" religious speech. Those who are intolerant of religious speech are permitted to silence it when on public property. Yet profanity and crudity are protected.

## RECENT EXAMPLES OF COURT RULINGS AND TRENDS:

- ◆ The Supreme Court upheld a zero given to a Tennessee student on her research paper because, when told to choose a topic of her choice, she chose the life of Christ.
- ◆ The Ohio Court of Appeals stopped Cleveland's schools from providing 2,000 disadvantaged children with vouchers to permit parents to choose a better school for their child. The court said it was unconstitutional because they might pick a parochial school.
- ◆ An Alabama court has forbidden the display of the Ten Commandments in a courtroom, even though it is the origin of much of our law.
- ◆ The Supreme Court agrees that San Francisco must remove a cross which had been in a public park for 65 years.
- ◆ The Supreme Court upholds a lower court decision forcing Edmond, Oklahoma, to remove a cross from among the several emblems on its city seal.
- ◆ School graduations are targets of those seeking to ban prayer or religious references. In Lee v. Weisman (1992), a rabbi's prayer was declared unconstitutional because it was deemed "psychological coercion" to expect others simply to listen respectfully.

- ◆ In 1980 the U.S. Supreme Court held the Ten Commandments could not be displayed at school. In 1985 it ruled a moment of silence at public school was unconstitutional, because it could be used by students for silent prayer.
- ◆ A courthouse Nativity scene was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1989 in Allegheny v. Pittsburgh ACLU because it was not "balanced" by secular objects. (No known case has required that a Santa display be balanced by religious objects.)
- ◆ Congress had to block the EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) from implementing its proposed regulations to restrict on-the-job religious discussions by workers.
- ◆ The ACLU is suing the State of Ohio for its state motto which says, "**With God, all things are possible.**"
- ◆ The ACLU is suing Nitro High School in West Virginia for its 17 year tradition of offering a prayer over the loudspeaker before football games.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO !

- ◆ **Call and write your Congressman or Senator to voice your concerns with regards to the Religious Freedom Amendment!**

## RFA ENDORSING GROUPS:

- ◆ American Conference of Jews and Blacks
- ◆ American Family Association
- ◆ Americans for Voluntary School Prayer
- ◆ American Muslim Council
- ◆ Americas Prayer Network
- ◆ Catholic Alliance
- ◆ Christian Action Network
- ◆ Christian Coalition
- ◆ Christian Voice
- ◆ Citizens for Excellence in Education
- ◆ Concerned Women for America
- ◆ Family Research Council
- ◆ Focus on the Family
- ◆ Free Congress Foundation
- ◆ Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship
- ◆ General Council of the Assemblies of God
- ◆ International Pentecostal Church of Christ
- ◆ National Association of Evangelicals ( *representing over 40 denominations* )
- ◆ National Clergy Council
- ◆ National Baptist Convention USA
- ◆ Religious Freedom Coalition
- ◆ Salvation Army
- ◆ Southern Baptist Convention
- ◆ Christian Life Commission
- ◆ Toward Tradition (Jewish Rabbinical Group)
- ◆ Traditional Values Coalition
- ◆ Trinity Global
- ◆ U.S. Family Network
- ◆ Youth For Christ

## CONTACT:

Congressman Ernest J. Istook  
119 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515  
PH: 202-225-2132  
FAX: 202-226-1463

Congressman Sanford Bishop  
1433 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515  
PH: 202-225-3631